

Winter

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Category: Westmark

Genre: Angst

Language: English

Status: Completed

Published: 2000-06-08 08:00:00

Updated: 2000-06-08 08:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 18:46:50

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 627

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Florian muses, years after the revolution. Grim some spoilers. Okay, quite a few spoilers. Rated for said spoilers, and good Lord, not my best.

Winter

[Author's notes: To my knowledge, Lloyd Alexander has no idea that I've written this. So don't take it as canon. If by some astronomical chance you're him, I mean no harm by it, and will gladly remove it from the face of the web if you wish. :) I am guessing on all the ages; they aren't given in the books, but I estimate Florian to have been about thirty at the end of The Beggar Queen, and the protagonists Theo and Mickle (alias Augusta) several years younger. Events political and personal that don't appear in the books are pure speculation, naturally.]

I will be sixty this winter, which isn't so bad till one thinks of the implications. It implies, for one thing, that I've lived too long. I have outlived the last queen of Westmark, who would now be in her fifties if she hadn't died in Napolita, twenty years ago. Died in exile; there's no need for me to regret that, but I do.

I've lived longer than my father ever did, though not as long as he might have. He was only fifty-five when he died. When I let him die. When -- let us not mince words, Florian -- when I gave him the means to kill himself, the only choice left to either of us.

So, so civil we were, genteel to the last. An understanding between gentlemen. Elegance in brutality, the very essence of what we were. What he was.

You grow morbid, Citizen Florian. You would have outlived him anyway.

Or possibly not. He was quite capable of surviving to a hundred and two, out of pure stubbornness.

Justin would have had me throw him to the mob. Justin had the subtlety of a charging ram, but then he couldn't have understood. Would not have wanted to understand. Poor child, I betrayed you just by being born, didn't I? But we're quits now.

Justin died before he was thirty, pursuing his vendetta against the world. I tried for years to help him find peace; I should have known better. It was vengeance he was seeking, not peace; his heart broke before his voice did, and there was nothing I could have done to heal that pain.

And Zara, my firebrand, keeper of my conscience, who called me a fool on the least provocation, and would promptly round on anyone else who dared. Russet divinity -- you were as bright with your anger as Justin was, though for a different reason. I wish it could have been different.

Zara died, with a bravery that broke my heart to hear of. There was never any yielding in Zara, no hesitation and no regret. She would be exasperated with me if she knew how badly I miss her still.

So very many did die young, and I am not innocent. I have done terrible things. I have caused others to do terrible things. For a greater good? Yes. But that still does not make me innocent.

For a greater good, but everyone is not obliged to agree with me.

Somewhere, somehow, someone has got wind of Augusta's daughter and son. Their names are whispered about, like passwords, like slogans; I know the tone of voice. The people are uncertain, nervous, insecure; like children, frightened by their own power. It won't take much more than a drought or a single corrupt councillor to tip them over the edge.

I know. I know my people all too well. They'll stumble once too often, and they'll cry out for their prince, their princess, to come and hold their hand, to save them.

Oh, my country.

Yes, I have lived too long.

End
file.